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Book Reviews

SYNAGOGUE POETRY

The huge store of Hebrew manuscripts discovered by the late Solomon Schechter in the Cairo Genizah and brought to Cambridge, has again provided material for a valuable contribution to Jewish archaeology.¹ Facsimiles of a number of palimpsests from the Genizah manuscripts were published in 1897 and 1900 by F. Crawford Burkitt and Charles Taylor. The lower writing on these palimpsests proved to be part of a synagogue copy of Aquila's Greek translation of the Bible. As to the superior writing, that on nine of the seventeen plates was identified as parts of the Talmud Yerushalmi and of the Midrash, and the remaining eight plates (two in Taylor's book and six in Burkitt's) have now been identified by Dr. Davidson as leaves from the cycle of synagogue poetry composed by Yannai, a liturgical poet of the seventh century. The amount of text found is only the merest fragment of what was the whole *Mahzor* of Yannai, inasmuch as the book was originally written for the three-year cycle of Torah reading followed in Palestine and in Egypt. Only seven *keroboth* were found in the palimpsest and there must have been over one hundred and fifty; furthermore not one of the seven is complete. But scant though the material is, Dr. Davidson has succeeded in deriving from it a number of valuable conclusions as to the work of Yannai, and as to the history of the development of the piut in general. The chief value, therefore, of the book before us is not so much as a text, but as to the light that these few fragments throw upon Jewish literary history.

The fragments, as Dr. Davidson shows, prove beyond doubt the existence of a complete book of Yannai's poetry with a *kerobah* for each sabbath of the triennial cycle. Zedekiah b. Abraham Anaw (thirteenth century) quotes R. Gershom as saying that Yannai was "one of the ancient sages who composed *keroboth* for every order (*seder*) of the year"; and Poznansky (*Jewish Quarterly Review*, XV, 77) published a book list found among the Genizah fragments, in which list "The Poems of Yannai" are mentioned. Dr. Davidson shows that these fragments which he found in the Genizah are based upon the successive weekly portions beginning Leviticus 13:29, 14:1, 14:33, 15:1, 15:25, and also 21:1, 22:17, thus proving that they are part of a larger and complete work, the hitherto lost *Mahzor* of Yannai.

The editor is also able to prove with more exactitude than hitherto possible, the date of Yannai's activity. It has been known since 1879

¹ *Mahzor Yannai, a Liturgical Work of the Seventh Century*. Edited from Genizah fragments by Israel Davidson, with additional notes by Louis Ginzberg. New York Jewish Theological Seminary, 1919, xlix+55+iv pages.

that Yannai lived at some time before Anan, the founder of the Karaitic sect, for Harkavy in *Ha-Magid* (Vol. XXIII [1879], p. 359) quotes Kirkisani, a tenth-century Karaite, to the effect that Anan took some of his halachic views from Yannai. But Dr. Davidson is able to fix the date more exactly; he notices that the verses given at the close of the first and second sections of each *Ḳerobah* are precisely the ones that are used as proems in Leviticus Rabba. Thus we have a *terminus a quo*, namely after Leviticus Rabba was fairly well edited, i.e., not earlier than the middle of the seventh century. The fact, moreover, that the *Ḳeroboth* are grouped around the three-year cycle supports the probability that Yannai was a Palestinian.

Some conclusions are also drawn as to the history of the piut literature in general. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth sections of each *Ḳerobah* is halachic in character, dealing with the laws found in the scriptural section to which the poem is attached, thus indicating that the piut was not originally midrashic or devotional in character, i.e., not exclusively so, but that it was used as a vehicle for instructing the people in the law. This supports the remark of Judah ben Barzillai (twelfth century) in *Sefer Haittim*, that at a certain time the laws were taught to the people through the medium of piutim. On page xli of the Introduction the editor offers a gratuitous justification for the use of such unseemly material as the laws of leprosy in the poems of Yannai. Since Yannai's poems are clearly halachic in character and in intention, and since they cover the whole Pentateuch, it is inevitable that he should deal with the laws of leprosy; and if we had the whole *Mahzor* of Yannai before us, we would find him dealing with the laws of injury in Exodus, and with the laws of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy. So the presence of laws of leprosy in the rhymed halacha of Yannai requires no more justification than does its presence in the unrhymed halacha of the *Mishna*.

In section 8 of his Introduction the editor gives a valuable analysis of the structure of Yannai's *Ḳeroboth*. He shows that a complete *Ḳerobah* contains nine distinct parts, each one in its place in the Tefilla and each one with distinct structural characteristics. Considering that Dr. Davidson had only seven fragments to compare and not one of them quite complete, the analysis is quite an achievement. The analysis will give a standard by which to judge whatever poems of Yannai may in the future be unearthed to see whether they are complete or not. Indeed the editor applied the test to the one *Ḳerobah* of Yannai of which we have hitherto known, namely the *Ḳerobah* for the Great Sabbath, One Pitre Raḥamathaim, and was able to demonstrate that four sections, and part of a fifth, are missing. The author includes this *Ḳerobah* and one other and a *silluk*, thus giving us all the poetry of Yannai extant. The notes added by Ginzberg are mostly halachic in character and are a great aid to the understanding of the laws referred to in the piutim.

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